the Governments concerned later this year, on the basis of which Government will take a considered view about the structure of the project as also the nature and extent of our participation in it.

The first meeting of the India-Iran special JWG was held in New Delhi on 3-4 August, 2005. During the meeting, it was *inter alia* agreed that on the basis of the recommendations of the financial consultants, there would be a preliminary understanding on the preferred project structure by early November 2005. Once there was agreement on the project structure between the three countries, the trilateral framework agreement would be finalized by the end of the current year.

ONGC's projects in Caspian region

2920. SHRIMATI SUKHBUNS KAUR: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether access to Caspian oil region has been considered necessary for India's energy security; and

(b) if so, what steps have been taken during 2004-05 and this year so far to secure a stake in the various oil blocks in the region for the ONGC and with what success so far?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline provides an unprecedented historic opportunity for Asian consumers like India to access Caspian oil at a port where the oil can be transported through the Suez Canal to the Arabian Sea or even by oil pipeline from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. In order to examine the feasibility of these proposals, the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, accompanied by oil PSU representatives, initiated discussions with the operators of the pipeline during his visits to Azerbaijan and Turkey in June, 2005. Again, ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL) and Kazmunaigaz (KMG), the national oil company of Kazakhstan, have entered into an MoU to jointly study Exploration and Production opportunities in Kazakhstan and to acquire assets. The recently concluded MoUs between the Mittal Group and ONGC/OVL are also expected to facilitate India's presence in hydrocarbon sector of the Caspian region.